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ABSTRACT

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STATE GOVERNMENT AND CONTROL OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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STATE GOVERNMENT AND CONTROL OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Informed persons interested in management know that effective organization, structure and process are all elements which are essential to the systems approach. We are already working diligently toward development of information, program, and management systems for higher education in order to improve the bases for planning and for operational decision-making. As yet those systems are directed toward only certain kinds of colleges and universities. Soon systems will be advanced for all types, thus laying the groundwork for possible supersystems which can be applied statewide to the whole network of public and possibly non-public institutions. As the technicians move toward this more comprehensive planning model they must make a series of assumptions about the agencies, boards and commissions which will conduct that planning. This paper briefly reviews recent developments of the organizations which have been legally designated by states to coordinate or govern the public colleges and universities. The intent is to present the outline of a model which comprehends the universe of post-secondary education more fully and with the possibility of more effectiveness than models now employed in practice.

Development of Statewide Coordination Efforts

The first coordinating board for higher education was authorized by a constitutional amendment in Oklahoma in 1941. By that time 14 other states had already placed all of their public senior-level institutions under a single governing board. From 1945 to 1968 only one additional state created a statewide governing board for higher education while 26 states authorized coordinating boards to bring order to the development of the existing institutions and their

governing boards. In addition, Michigan and Pennsylvania followed the long standing example of New York by creating single governing-supervising boards for all of public education--kindergarten through college.

This history indicates the recent overwhelming attraction of state legislatures for coordination rather than pure centralization under "One Big Board." Primarily the politicians turned in this direction because of the ease of creating a coordinating board with certain limited statutory powers without disturbing long-established institutional governing boards often composed of influential citizens. By this action opposition to coordination by major institutions was tempered, no basic statutes were greatly disturbed, and constitutional amendments were avoided. More than any other single factor, it was the ease with which coordinating boards could be authorized that made it more popular than the single statewide governing board. Nothing in the few historical documents available indicates that a theory underlay coordination which explored the substantive advantages of this new arrangement. As is so often the case, once a few states move in a direction others soon follow--even to the point of adopting much of the language of earlier enabling statutes of other states.

Current Trends

Rather unexpectedly, and with very little public debate and with limited professional study, a few states have abolished their coordinating boards in order to create a single all-powerful governing board. Several other states are considering a similar move. Why this disillusionment with coordination? Have such boards failed, are they misunderstood, or do governing boards have superior attributes only now fully recognized?

One thing is certain. The single state governing board for the public

institutions appears to establish a system which can be directly controlled by a single group of lay citizens which, with its staff, has primary responsibility for the welfare of the institutions in the system. It is a simple structure. For management purposes and for systems technicians (to say little of governors and legislators) this arrangement might appear ideal. Power is ostensibly centralized, accountability fixed and sanctions are available to control the uncooperative. The former maze of boards, often in competition with each other for new programs, money and prestige, is gone.

While many related problems might be cited, we believe that student and faculty unrest and the increasingly high financial demands of colleges and universities led to the concomitant demand by the public, governors, and legislatures for greater and more certain accountability. The seeking of simplistic solutions for complex problems, a fault generally characteristic of the American political scene, in turn led to the resurgent idea that a single all-powerful governing board could also be charged with full responsibility for all that happened in the public colleges and universities. (The law-and-order view of the world.) Secondly, the leading state universities, rather than opposing vociferously as they would have ten (or even five) years before, seemed indifferent or in outright favor of the shift. Such reaction may have resulted from the inability of the leading university to control statewide coordinating policy and also the expectation that under a single board it might be able to dominate the system.

It seems ironic that higher education, which has usually adopted the governance model of the industrial corporation, should now turn away from it at the very time it calls for decentralization into major and at times competing segments, especially of corporate conglomerates. Holding companies of conglomerates are at least as analagous to statewide coordinating boards as was the former

corporate board, executive officer, and bureaucracy to those of the colleges and universities.

The complexities of modern industrial life are easily matched by higher education in most states. The vastly increased numbers of decisions which must be made in both spheres call for use of myriad professional specialists as staff advisors and consultants and a variety of levels and places for long-range and operational decision-making. In both industry and higher education coordinating type structures have proven more flexible, more adaptive, and more effective in planning than pyramidal hierarchies. I found this to be true in 1957 after study of all states then having coordinating boards and a sample of those with statewide governing boards. Berdahl, in his study of 27 states ten years later, came to the same conclusion. The coordinating boards have been superior in developing and in implementing master plans and have been just as effective in meeting new educational needs and also in limiting competition among institutions for money and programs as the statewide governing boards. Thus, no evidence acquired shows that single boards will in fact meet the expectations of the politicians.

On the contrary, I believe that the shift away from the coordinating board would be for most states a major policy error based on outmoded assumptions about organization and decision process and on the nostalgic desire to return to the relatively simple life. The exceptions would be the states which have few institutions, little population growth and modest industrialization. It is significant indeed that the states which have recently opted for the single board are the least educationally complex in the nation.

Future Needs

The advantages of the coordinating board are based on extensive researches and analyses of statewide systems. Just as important as past evidence, however,

is the need to anticipate future problems and changes and to determine which alternative structures will best adapt to a very different scheme of post-secondary education than exists today. A few of many changes occurring today are touched on later. What they indicate is a need for state structures for postsecondary education which have adaptive capabilities, which will encourage rather than discourage basic modifications of existing educational patterns, and which encompass far more of postsecondary education than the traditional public college and university system. A single statewide governing board can meet few of these imperative needs; a coordinating board appropriately composed, staffed and operated can meet them all.

The Role and Function of Coordinating Boards

Coordinating boards provide a vehicle by which both the public interests of the state and those of the educational community can be objectively and dispassionately considered and acted upon. The board operates in a kind of no-man's-land between higher education and the state government. Its effectiveness depends on maintaining the confidence of both. If the board is consistently dominated by, or is thought to be dominated by, the higher educators (as governing boards traditionally are), it loses credibility in the state capitol. Conversely, if the board consistently acts merely, or is thought to act merely, as an arm of state government, the institutions lose their cooperative spirit. Even though a board may find it virtually impossible to maintain a perfect equilibrium between these two forces, balance should be the goal. The board membership, the staff, the powers and the advisory networks, should all reflect this dual obligation.

The danger of creating a board too weak is that the public interest will not be adequately protected; in creating a board too strong, that the necessary

autonomy and initiative of the institutions will be threatened. A model of coordination should attempt to strike an appropriate balance between strength and weakness and between the interests of the state and of institutions. The outline of a model proposed here is derived from the actual experiences encountered in both coordinating and governing board states.

Besides the intermediary role between state and public institutions, the coordinating board has one great paramount advantage over other existing structures for the public systems. That is its ability to act as an umbrella under which a variety of other institutions, agencies, commissions and councils relating to higher education may be placed for state coordination. The following items indicate why these additional agencies must be considered in a systems approach to postsecondary education.

1. Private colleges are demanding more attention from the states. They want scholarship and also direct grant programs that will funnel state money into their institutions. In some states they have already agreed to certain of the informational requests and controls already applicable to the public system. It becomes increasingly apparent that these institutions must become an integral part of the state's concern for the beneficent development of higher education.

2. Too, the rapidly accelerating enrollments and the newly important role of the proprietary vocational and technical schools force the state to recognize and to involve in its master planning their potential contributions. The state may invite their cooperation for the quid pro quo of allowing the use of state scholarship and grant funds for students attending such institutions.

3. The federal planning, grant, and categorical programs which require a state administrative commission "representative of all segments of postsecondary education" for control and disbursement of funds can also be absorbed by or come under the umbrella of the coordinating board.

4. The state's own scholarship and loan commission, building authority, merit system commission, central purchasing agency and other offices which deal primarily with postsecondary institutions, can and should become a part of the coordinating complex.

5. New demands that public and nonpublic colleges and universities, along with local public service agencies, business and citizen groups, create cooperative and flexible arrangements for entirely new kinds of educational experiences and modes of planning and control.

Beyond these existing and potential agencies, coordination needs to reflect the impact of new technologies for education and their potential for much of education to be offered in the home, offices, churches and cultural centers as easily as on college campuses. Also, if management information systems and program budgeting are to lead to a more rational planning process, they must comprehend far more of postsecondary education in order to promote the efficient management and effective use of state resources. These many agencies and interests are now haphazardly coordinated by the governor and the legislature and no compatible system relates planning and management information among them.

The establishment of a single governing board for only the public institutions does not meet the principal needs cited above, nor in most cases would it be legally possible for it to do so. Because of its identification as the one board which represents both governors and public institutional interests, the nonpublic institutions cannot be confident that the board will impartially plan for them. Nor will the nonpublics look with favor on the state scholarship and grant programs for students or direct grants to the nonpublic colleges being administered through the public governing board. Federal requirements that state agencies which administer their plans must be broadly representative of postsecondary education, prevent the public governing boards from exercising

this responsibility. Relationships with other state and private agencies relating to postsecondary education present similar obstacles.

On the other hand, the coordinating board is a participatory agency relying on widespread consensus for its decisions and on persuasion and cooperation rather than fiat and pure power for policy implementation. This concept is reinforced by the board's composition and working practices.

The coordinating board should be composed of a majority of lay citizens unconnected with any higher education institution or agency, and, if at all possible within desirable size limits, representatives from the lay boards of institutions and agencies under coordination should also sit on the coordinating board. The staff of the board should be relatively small but exceptionally competent. Most of the actual planning and policy suggestions should come from the widespread use of ad hoc advisory committees, task forces, and study groups composed of experts from both education and the society as well as interested citizens at large. The reasons for the strong advocacy of these recommendations derive from the operating conceptual model seen as most successful for today's needs as well as those of the future.

While the organization and mode of operation are thus described, certain legal powers must be held by the board to underpin and reinforce the intent of the state to plan and create a comprehensive system. I recommend the following minimum powers:

1. To acquire planning data and information from all postsecondary institutions and agencies.
2. To engage in continuous planning, both long-range and short-range.
3. To review and approve or disapprove new and existing degree programs, new campuses, extension centers, departments and centers of all public institutions, and where substantial state aid is given, of private institutions.

4. To review and make recommendations on any and all facets of both operating and capital budgets of public institutions.

5. To administer directly or have under its coordinative powers all state scholarship and grant programs to students, grant programs to nonpublic institutions, and all state-administered federal grant and aid programs for postsecondary education.

I know that some persons in higher education will resolutely oppose giving a coordinating board that many powers. But the choice today is not between strengthening the coordinating board or retaining the status quo. Rather it is between having an effective coordinating board with at least these powers or seeing public higher education ingested into the executive branch of state government. The latter possibility emerges from a combination of trends: A steady increase in the power of the governor's office in many states to provide closer supervision and control of all state programs; a response in some states to the increasing costs and complexity of higher education by tightening of controls over spending and program duplication; a surge of state interest and enactments setting up state management information systems and requiring program budgeting; and a reaction against the governing power of students and faculty by drawing higher education closer to state governmental control.

I believe that strengthened coordination is the best way to protect the public interest in higher education with minimum impairment of institutional autonomy. While the clear tendency is to put power in the hands of the governor, he, as well as the legislature, needs an agency to coordinate all the matters relating to postsecondary education. Executive budget offices and state development and economic planning agencies are too broad in scope to comprehend their diversity of problems and issues. The state will be more effectively served by the instrument of coordination recommended here. At the same time, the institutions have a reasonable chance of avoiding the debilitating experience

of being continuously under strong political intervention and pressures by a governor subjected to the transient will of special interest groups and political faddism.

Legal Status and Jurisdiction

The role of the coordinating board and the necessity of its exercising certain powers raise the issue of whether it should be established by statute or by constitutional provision.

In some of the states currently considering constitutional revision, questions have arisen over retaining constitutional autonomy for those institutions which now have it and/or extending it to the coordinating board and institutions which do not. The issue is relevant because if the state university has constitutional autonomy and the coordinating board does not, it is most unlikely that effective planning and program review will take place because the board of the autonomous institution usually has full management and control over the institution(s) under its jurisdiction and in theory is free of all state controls except the obvious ones associated with state appropriations.

If the coordinating board is given constitutional status and its powers are amply spelled out, problems should not arise about its mandate to plan and coordinate the state system of higher education. On the other hand, statutory authorizations are sufficient for statewide coordination if none of the agencies or institutions which are to be coordinated have constitutional powers.

The intent of this short discourse has been to present outlines of a model for the planning and effective development of postsecondary education. In so doing, attention has been directed to some institutions and agencies which up to now have not been fully considered as being an essential source of input for information systems or a part of the statewide communications and management network. If state systems are indeed to become more rationally oriented,

if program budgeting is to become reality, and if essential data and information for coordination and planning is to be collected, we need a much more catholic view of what organizational elements comprise postsecondary education. Limiting our focus to just the public colleges and universities, or even to all of what is traditionally considered higher education, is insufficient.

I recognize and accept the fact that progress in systems development comes about step by step rather than in one glorious leap. Nevertheless, in taking those small steps we must be conscious of the eventual parameters and depth of the system we are attempting to rationalize.